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THE MORAL TRAINING OF CHILDREN

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The type of character moral education should seek to foster is no mere negative respectability or virtue of cowardice, but the whole positive and effective moral personality, seeing the best, loving the best, willing the best. Moral education is, therefore, not a *phase* of education, but *all* education focussed. The one aim significant enough to solve the controversies of modern education, to integrate the whole process, furnish the basic principle for a reasoned philosophy and annul the conflict between training for vocation and education for life, is positive moral character.

MORAL IMPORT IN ALL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION

No aspect of education is indifferent in relation to that aim, and the specific value of each phase of the process is finally determined by its contribution to it. Hence the harmful triviality of the notion that moral education means teaching "morals and manners" to children thirty minutes a day, three times a week!

The merest statical conditions surrounding the child bear directly on the development of character. It is a moral necessity that schoolrooms should be well ventilated and lighted, with quietly tinted walls and unobtrusive but beautiful decorations, that the grounds should be ample and pleasant. So too, physical education finds its proper place, not in training muscular strength or manual expertness, but in developing the sound, healthy, graceful body that may be a fitting instrument for the mind and spirit.

Every study in the curriculum directly affects the same end. It is a moral question that an arithmetic problem should be worked honestly, that every lesson should be done thoroughly. Nature study is the great opportunity to teach, without didactic moralizing, the two fundamental moral principles—effort and conformity—work and obedience. The whole order of life is based upon them.

If you sow chaff, you cannot reap wheat. If you shirk plowing, there is a lessened harvest.

MORAL VALUE OF LITERATURE AND HISTORY

Nature, however, sanctions deceit, cruelty and blind selfishness. The higher moral principles—love, unselfish service, sacrifice—are evident only in human life. Hence the supreme value for moral education of those subjects in the curriculum that represent humanism. In the elementary period they are two: history—then chiefly biography—and literature. The two subjects are singularly complementary: history records the actions of men; literature expresses their ideals and aspirations. History thus gives the body of that of which literature expresses the soul.

Both subjects present life under the reign of law, history telling what has happened, literature showing what, given certain characters and conditions, must have happened. In both, the laws governing life can be taught, often far more effectively than by direct ethical instruction. In both, further, is the record of noble deeds and the portrayal of lofty characters. The result is a gradual molding of ideals supremely important for the whole after life. Not only noble, but mingled characters are portrayed—all sorts of human beings; so that the student learns to reach out over them and appreciate them, and to say, even as child, with the old Latin poet, "I am Man, and nothing human is foreign to me."

DIRECT ETHICAL INSTRUCTION

This indirect moral teaching must, of course, be supplemented by direct ethical instruction, which, while not the most important part of moral education, is nevertheless indispensable. To do right, one must know the right. To give this instruction wisely is difficult, for children resent didactic moralizing even more than we do. The teaching must be closely associated with the child's experience, and yet not lost in the concrete, the great principles of life and conduct being gradually developed. All of them, with one exception, are implicit in the experience even of the child. Thus the aim of life, the path leading to the aim, and the laws governing our conduct in the path, can all be taught, without leaving the field of the child's own experience. Generally speaking, the wiser the teacher, the less

desirable is a text-book, in view of the fact that the text-books available are so didactic and artificial. Talks with the children (not *at* them), at regular intervals, dealing with the problems in their own home and school life, or with the moral questions arising from the studies above considered, form the ideal medium for such instruction, if the teacher is wise enough to use it. The guiding principle should be that no critical experience of the child's life be allowed to pass into the dim shadows of the yesterdays, without having the meaning of it brought home clearly to the child's mind.

MORAL VALUE OF WORK AND PLAY

Even more important in the development of positive and effective moral personality are the activities of the child and the government and discipline to which he is subjected. Every influence playing upon him gets its final meaning only when interpreted in terms of the child's own activity.

As in ethics the superstition long prevailed that action was morally worthy in proportion as it was hard and unlovely, so in education the parallel notion held sway for ages that action is educative in proportion to its hard, forbidding character. Rousseau made the great protest against this notion; and what Rousseau saw, Froebel worked out, far more sanely. It is impossible to exaggerate our debt to the kindergarten for showing the immense educational value of wisely guided play. In work, part of the energy is spent in overcoming friction; while in play, all the energy goes into acquiring the activity; hence it is learned much more rapidly. Play, moreover, is the great opportunity for appreciating the big aspects of human experience, and especially for learning voluntary social co-operation in the pursuit of common ends.

Were human nature perfect, play would be the one form of action; but no one is fitted for life who is not willing and able to do a great many things he does not like to do, because it is right that he should do them. Thus, in education, work must be constantly utilized, as well as play, for the development of character. Work gives the mastery of the means necessary to the ends we seek and develops self-direction and self-control. In the abuse of the kindergarten and in many homes, where children are titillated and cajoled into right behaviour, and where nothing is required of them

except what they like to do, the result is a flabby, uncontrolled character, utterly unfit for the serious business of life.

If children are not required to do some part of the work of the household, they will not only lack self-dependence, but grow up into social snobs. The only way to teach a child respect for simple labor is to require him regularly to perform it. The school can utilize for moral training, not only forms of industrial work and manual training—the grammar of physical action—but those subjects, such as mathematics and the languages, which are tools rather than ends. Moreover, no matter how strong the child's interest in a study, there is plenty of dead work in any subject if it is honestly mastered. In requiring this work to be done regularly and thoroughly lies one of the best opportunities for developing positive and effective moral personality.

This does not mean that the parent or teacher should multiply obstacles for the sake of discipline. Remove all possible rocks and fallen trees from the path, and there will be work and hard climbing enough, if one *travels the path*. The more that work is transformed into play, the better, for always plenty of hard work remains for the full development of character.

GOVERNMENT AND DISCIPLINE

In both work and play, the moral result depends upon the guidance from above. In fact the child's life is constantly under government and discipline, which exercise the crowning influence upon character. An autocratic tyranny in the school, even more than in the state, tends to mold two types of citizens—slaves and nihilists. The weak children, those who like to obey, become blindly submissive to the autocratic will over them. We call such children good, but often they are merely docile. They are not fitted to be citizens of a democracy, to think for themselves, choose the best, resist injustice and display moral initiative. Just the strongest children, on the other hand, those who have the best stuff of human nature in them, tend to become rebels under an autocratic tyranny. We call such children bad; but generally they are not bad at all—merely misdirected. If we have made it a sheer conflict between the child's will and our own, and the child conquers, all honor to the child! The pity of it is, however, that such children

are not fitted to go out into the world where there is no freedom of caprice, but only freedom to obey the laws of life, and be happy and helpful, or to break yourself against them and perish.

Thus every reason for risking the experiment of democracy in the state is a multiplied obligation to apply it in the government and discipline of the home and school. Blind obedience to authority at best forms a moral habit, which will go to pieces with astonishing celerity if it is not transformed into intelligent response to law; but each time a child voluntarily obeys a principle, the reason for which he understands, he takes an important step forward in his own moral development. Thus the teacher should take the children into his confidence, avoid making rules, and talk with them over the questions of discipline that arise. Let the children formulate the principle for themselves, and then how the hands of the one in authority are strengthened, in dealing with the rare refractory case, by the public opinion of the school. Democracy in the government of children means that the aim is not the ease and comfort of the parent, the economic order of the school or the reputation of the teacher, but the *moral welfare* of each child.

This does not mean that democracy can be applied completely at the start. That has not been possible in the history of the race, nor can it be in the development of the individual. Little children obey us because they love, respect or fear us, and long before the child can understand why, he should obey. If a child grows to be seven or eight years old without forming the habit of regular response to the authority over him, irreparable harm has been done. First, obedience, then rational and intelligent obedience as fast as possible. The point is that we should welcome and seek to further the transformation from the one type to the other as rapidly as we can. Habit is merely the stuff out of which morality is made; it is only when conduct is voluntary and intelligent response to law, recognized as just, that moral character is formed.

It is hard to relinquish authority, and the better one's moral equipment and judgment, the more difficult is it to let go at the right time. Nevertheless, morally, as physically, the child can learn to walk only by walking. He will fall and hurt himself, it is true, but he must try; and with all our superior knowledge and wisdom, we must welcome his effort, relinquish our personal authority as fast as possible, and welcome the transference of his reverence

and response from us to the laws of life we are trying to interpret to him. Then we may reasonably hope that he will go out into the world, able to express intelligent initiative in our democracy, and to live voluntarily in harmony with the great laws of life.¹

¹ For a fuller discussion of the various aspects of moral education considered in this brief survey, the reader is referred to the author's work on *Moral Education*, published by B. W. Huebsch, New York.